

## THE LIGHT THAT PURSUES KINDNESS

### Proposal for a one-hour documentary film

This proposal is inspired by the tale of two towns:

Gravenhurst, Ontario. Two hours drive north of Toronto. Population 11,000. Known before World War Two as "Sawdust City", as it was the home of 17 sawmills. It is now known to Canadians mainly as Gateway to the Muskoka Lake cottage region. It is also known to some Canadians, and to a billion Chinese, as the place where Norman Bethune was born in March, 1890.

Jun Chang, China. A farmers' market town in Tang County, Hebei province, two hours south-west of Beijing. Population 5,000. It is totally un-known to Canadians, and known to a billion Chinese as the place where Norman Bethune was buried in November, 1939.

The two towns were twinned in 1986. And although few citizens from Gravenhurst travel to China, about 5,000 Chinese tourists come to pay homage to Bethune in Gravenhurst every summer. Bethune Memorial House trains young Gravenhurst residents every year to be tour guides for visitors. They develop a knowledge and a passion for Bethune close to his fans in China.

I propose to do a film with two of these tour guides as they make the trek to the sites in Hebei province where Bethune did his legendary work in 1938-39.

Jennifer Black, 20, is in her second year as an undergraduate in pre-law at Waterloo University. Last summer, when working as a guide at Memorial House, she designed a chart of the Bethune family tree. That sparked her interest and intense fascination with Bethune's work in China. As a student in Waterloo's peace and justice program, she can earn course credits by working for a few weeks in a foreign country.

Brynn Higgins-Stirrup, 19, is Jennifer's best friend. She is doing her undergraduate studies in art history at Queen's University. She has become enthralled with Bethune as well through Jennifer.

Their trip to Jun Chang next summer will be an experience of discovery – of Bethune's work, of the Chinese culture, of the Chinese adoration of a Canadian. They will be hosted in Hebei province by the Bethune Military Medical College (BMMC) in the city of Shijianzhuang.

Hebei province surrounds Beijing. It is where Bethune's pioneer work establishing mobile medical units on the front line of the anti-Japanese war earned him the title of Bai Chu En (the Light that Pursues Kindness), and it is where he drew up his plans, between battles, for a front-line military medical school to be funded by supporters in Canada and the US. The support never came, but he managed to open

a small model of the school in the village of Niuyangou on September 18, 1939, just two months before his death.

The Bethune Military Medical College grew out of that small school. As one of the principal schools for the training of medical personnel for the Chinese armed forces, it has always considered itself as the primary beacon in China for promoting Bethune's vision of medical workers as people "who put patients above themselves", who "go to the wounded instead of waiting for patients to come to them". Those quotes are at the foot of a statue of Bethune that dominates the main square at the centre of the campus of BMMC.

The College sent Qi Ming, the head of its English department, to Gravenhurst in 1989 for a five-month study of Bethune's Canadian roots, and he has been coming to Gravenhurst almost bi-annually ever since to visit the friends he made there.

One of them is mayor John Clinck, who went to Shijianzhuang in 2001 for the unveiling of the Bethune statue at the BMMC. Clinck also visited, of course, the villages of Niuyangou and Jun Chang, two hours away in the farming County of Tang, where Bethune started the medical school, and where he was first buried in 1939.

Clinck is one of the few foreigners WHO have been to these villages. They are not marked on highway maps of China, and are not easy to find. Qi Ming will be showing the way to Jennifer and Brynn when they arrive from Gravenhurst this summer, and he will have them accompanied by two or three of his own 20-year-old first-year students:

Zhang Wen Chuo, is training as a nurse for service in the air force. She is the daughter of a civil servant, knows the Bethune story well, speaks English with zest, and likes to be called "Sonya". "I am like a boy. I like playing basketball and football, and singing karioki."

Kuo Yen is training as a doctor for service in the army. He is from the same home town as Zhang Wen Chuo, where his father works in a factory. He likes to be called "Confidence". "I was impressed by what I learned about Bethune when my mother was a patient in the Bethune Peace Hospital next door".

Yuan Hai Xin is training as a nurse for service in the navy. She comes from a distant sea-side town. "I miss my parents a lot, and want to be a doctor like my aunt so I can take care of them when they grow old....I went to a high school founded by Canadian missionaries, and learned about how the Canadian Pacific Railway was built by Chinese workers".

None of these young people have been to the sites where Bethune worked. The body of the film will be about the excitement of discovery they will share with Jennifer and Brynn as Qi Ming guides them along the path that Bethune followed. Zhang Wen Chuo will be their interpreter. Her difficulties in interpreting will result in a lot of laughter. Qi Ming will come to her aid.

During their 10 days together, their adventure will reveal as much about themselves as about Norman Bethune. Therein lies the originality of this film. Ted Allan, Don Brittain, Rod Stewart, Larry Hannant and Adrienne Clarkson have all enriched our knowledge of the Bethune story, but we have yet to learn about the relevance of that story to our lives today. What motivates Jennifer, Brynn, Chuo, Yen and Xin to undertake this voyage of discovery? And what will it reveal about the ability of young people today to live by the values of internationalism and service that Bethune represents? The answers to these questions will unravel as they follow the four main chapters of Bethune's time in Hebei province:

- (1) The White Stallion—the period in the last three months of 1938 when he established mobile medical units and blood banks at the fighting front in the Taihang mountains in west Hebei, did surgery in Buddhist temples, refused to eat more than his patients, came to be called “Bai Chu En” (The Light that Pursues Kindness) by the soldiers, was assigned a captured white stallion by General Nieh, and was put in command by Chairman Mao of all Communist medical forces.
- (2) The Marco Polo bridge—the period in the first four months of 1939 when he crossed the Japanese lines on the plains in east Hebei, invented a wooden case which he called the Marco Polo bridge for transporting medical supplies on the back of a donkey, lost the hearing of his left ear, and inspired the soldiers to attack while shouting “Bethune is with us!”, knowing that they could count on good medical treatment if they became wounded.
- (3) The Five Year Plan—the period of four months in the middle of 1939 when he returned to west Hebei, established cooperatives for the making of surgical gauze, splints and artificial legs, drew up a plan for the construction of a medical school to meet the needs of the communist forces for the five years he predicted it would take to defeat the Japanese, and opened the small preliminary medical school at Niuyangou village which later became the BMMC.
- (4) Old Man of the Mountain—cut his finger on October 28 while operating in a temple at Mo Tien Ling (Sky-Kissing Mountain), name changed to “Lao Jen Cha” (Old Man of the Mountain) by soldiers, carried for several days to safety in Huang-Shi Kou village (“Yellow Stone Pass”), died there of septicaemia on November 12, carried for another five days for burial in Jun Cheng, where villagers see a formation in the surrounding hills that resemble Bethune's silhouette. Tomb-stone and statue later constructed with marble carried by villagers over the next few months from a quarry across Japanese lines 50 kms away.

The film will open and close with scenes of the daily lives of our young protagonists before and after their adventure—Chuo, Yen and Xin doing their daily recital of Mao's eulogy to Bethune and attending their classes at the BMMG; while Jennifer

and Brynn work at Bethune House in Gravenhurst and attend their classes in Waterloo and Kingston.

By the time they are back in Gravenhurst, the number of visitors from China will begin to have increased dramatically. China recently granted to Canada an Approved Destination Status for Chinese tourists. As a result, Ottawa has granted \$1 million to Bethune Memorial House for the expansion of its facilities. They will be opened with pomp and circumstance in the spring of 2011. This film should be ready for that opening.

Martin Duckworth